

The Stelter Elm

Marquette County

An extraordinary elm that grew on the Stelter farm near Montello in Marquette County was one of the biggest in the state before it had to be removed, a victim of Dutch elm disease. It measured approximately 15 feet in circumference and had a crown spread of nearly 90 feet.

The Stelters dearly loved that tree. The *Milwaukee Journal* once ran a picture of Theodore Stelter resting under it. The Elm Research Institute recognized the old monarch. Theodore Stelter took the time to write down the following history of their dooryard tree, which had given them so much pleasure for so many years.

Theodore's father, William, bought the farm at auction in 1886, but no tools came with it. William and his father, Gustave, went into Princeton to buy some tools, including a shovel, and on the way home Gustave noticed a small elm tree, about three feet high, growing at the intersection of Highway 23 and Country Trunk C. "You need shade around the house," Gustave said. "Why don't you take the new shovel and dig up that elm and plant it in your front yard."

As the elm grew to maturity, it did shade the house, keeping it pleasantly cool in the summer. The whole family often sat outside on stones placed under its branches. When company came, they took out chairs to sit on. "Even when it was hot, 90 degrees," wrote Theodore, "the wind came under the elm and the air was always cool and comforting. When resting at noon, or when it was very hot, we sat in the shade of the elm to cool off."

After a hospital stay in 1981, Theodore, 75, came back to his home, but he could no longer dress or undress himself. Yet he hated to leave. "The last two nights I slept with shoes and clothes on, unwilling to leave my beautiful home. I cried when I had to leave. We worked very hard and long hours to make it beautiful, so to leave it was heartbreaking."

But the elm tree had gone first. In telling about the removal of the tree in 1979, Theodore Stelter wrote: "It took two big bulldozers to dig under and tip out the stump, about 12 feet by 12 feet. And then it took two big bulldozers to push it into the pasture."

Sources: Theodore Stelter, Montello
J. A. Kronschnabel, Montello